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# U. S. Plays Quiet Role In Prisoner Exchange

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The Kennedy administration is playing a quiet role on-stage in the negotiations for the release of 11 U.S. prisoners, but it is moving behind the scenes.

The involvement of the administration in the negotiations can be deduced from any close check of the statements and activities of the State and Government officials since the exchange of prisoners and Government officials began shortly after the Cuban invasion of April, 1961.

Reports from Havana indicate the negotiators may be very close to securing the release of the Cubans captured in the United States-directed invasion. Fidel Castro, in exchange for \$53-million worth of food, drugs and equipment, may send the men back to the United States before Christmas, probably Sunday.

James B. Donovan, the chief negotiator for the release of the prisoners, returned to Havana today after a night in Miami.

He expressed optimism before departing for Havana for a quick trip to Miami last night. In a statement, he said that Mr. Donovan said he submitted to Mr. Castro a preliminary list of medicines and drugs already committed to the American Red Cross for shipment to Cuba. The Cuban government prepared an analysis of the list.

Mr. Donovan had that analysis with him when he departed Miami to obtain the latest list of additional commitments.

President Kennedy is said to be disassociating himself from the negotiating committee's efforts. "This is being done by the private committee," he said at his December 12 news conference. "I'm not very sympathetic to their efforts."

But the committee, to stage the kind of operation the exchange involves, would need more than sympathy from the President.

The American Red Cross has reported that railroads, airlines and trucking firms are working round-the-clock to push thousands of pounds of food and medicine into Florida for quick shipment to Cuba in case the deal is completed.

## Attorney General's Role

There have been reports that the President's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, is directing the Government operation in support of the committee and Mr. Donovan. In New York business sources said that Attorney General Kennedy had made the request for some of the food and drugs being readied for shipment to Cuba.

These sources said Mr. Kennedy described himself as acting as a private person, rather than as an administration official. Mr. Kennedy told the sources, they said, that the operation had the full support of the President but there were legal objections to the direct participation of the President.

They said the Attorney General also told them Mr. Castro might raise his price if he believed the Government, rather than private parties, was supplying the food and drugs.

## Advice Given

Last night, Edwin O. Guthman, public information officer for the Justice Department, acknowledged that it and the Internal Revenue Service made staff members available to advise lawyers working with Mr. Donovan on tax questions and similar matters.

"We have been expediting rulings and assisting it in an advisory way, but it is entirely a committee operation," he said.

Mr. Guthman was asked for comment after Dr. Arnold Beckman, president of Beckman Instrument Co. of Fullerton, Calif., said a Washington attorney called him from the Justice Department and asked for \$60,000 worth of equipment.

Mr. Beckman called the exchange "Castro blackmail . . . not in keeping with the dignity of the United States."

Mr. Beckman would not identify the lawyer. He said the attorney told him he represented the Cuban Families Committee and the Red Cross.

Lawyers working on the exchange were called by the Red Cross at apartment phones, but that the suburban Opa-Locka Airport.

The Government has not placed a decisive part in the negotiations, but speculation about the role would damage the case for release of the prisoners.

Mr. Beckman said some of the requested instruments have been considered of strategic importance and shouldn't be sent to a Communist country. On this, Mr. Guthman commented that any goods that might be sent to Cuba would be cleared first by the Commerce Department.

Meanwhile, drug industry sources said in New York initial contacts on the exchange were made in October by Mr. Donovan, a vice president of the American Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association met in New York December 10 and 11.

## A Good Cause

Dr. J. H. "Big Boy" Manu- said the Association decided the cause was a good one and that the industry should supply the drugs.

Drugmakers may have been particularly sensitive to the requests because of the widespread industry during recent congressional hearings and also because of the fear about the drug trade.

Lincoln White, press officer of the State Department, declined comment Monday when asked if the Government itself was donating money or food or drugs to the negotiating committee.

Key members of Congress killed a move earlier in the year to use \$13.5 million in available Central Intelligence Agency funds to pay for medical supplies in the proposed prisoners' exchange. They made it clear they would not go along with the direct use of Federal funds for the payment of what they call ransom.

## Tax Deduction Approved

Last night, the Internal Revenue Service ruled that any person or any firm that donates medicine or food in the prisoner exchange may list the value as a charity tax deduction.

Administration sources said consideration is being given to permitting the drug manufacturers to charge off \$25 million in taxes for the drugs prepared for shipment to Cuba. Presumably this would represent the wholesale value of \$52 million in retail prices of the drugs.

No special privilege is being granted, said Internal Revenue Service Commissioner Mortimer M. Caplin. Rather, he said in a statement, the ruling is an interpretation of the law under which some 40,000 taxpayers get similar deductions each year.

Earlier, administration sources said drug manufacturers might get tax deductions for donating supplies to the private committee. And Senate Democratic Leader Mansfield predicted Congress would go along with any tax relief move.

Hickenlooper Opposes Relief However, Senator Hickenlooper of Iowa, chairman of the Republican Policy Committee, opposed such relief, calling it a "direct use of Government money for the payment of ransom."

Meanwhile a cargo ship, the S. S. African Pilot, arrived at Port Everglades, Fla., to take on the medicines and other supplies for shipment to Cuba.

The Coast Guard patrolled the area where the 10,000-ton vessel tied up at 9:30 a.m. after a trip from Baltimore.

Available for immediate loading were 11 box cars of barter supplies brought to the port 30 miles north of Miami by the Florida East Coast and Seaboard Air Line railroads.

Other materials were being shipped by the Red Cross at apartment phones, but that the suburban Opa-Locka Airport.

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